

Ad Hoc Coalition on Federal Budget Matters Affecting Connecticut

c/o CT Voices for Children
33 Whitney Avenue
New Haven, CT 06510

August 30, 2005

To: The Connecticut Congressional Delegation
Re: Proposed Federal Budget Cuts: Medicaid and Food Stamps

We write to express our deep concern about the potential cuts and structural changes that threaten the Medicaid and Food Stamp programs in the reconciliation process. We ask that you do all you can to preserve these proven, essential supports for Connecticut's children and adults.

Recent figures show that:

- Nearly 488,000 Connecticut residents benefit from the Medicaid program. This estimate includes more than 263,000 children, 62,000 elderly residents, 61,000 blind and disabled persons, and 103,000 other adults.
- More than 203,000 Connecticut residents benefit from the Food Stamp program. This estimate includes over 92,000 children, 21,000 elderly residents and 36,000 persons with disabilities.

These two programs not only help meet two essential needs of our state's most vulnerable residents, but also are cost effective. Medicaid reduces the crowding of our emergency rooms with persons in health crises that are more costly to treat, the potential for outbreaks of communicable disease, days of work lost to untreated illness, and the temporary and permanent impairment of health status among those already at greater risk for health problems. In the case of Food Stamps, the program assures basic nutrition so essential to children's capacity to learn and to the capacity of our seniors and persons with disabilities to survive. Food Stamps are credited with the near disappearance of the severe malnutrition-related health problems that had been documented prior to the institution of the program.

Although we realize that you do not serve as a member of the Committees of cognizance on these matters, we also know that you are held in high esteem by your colleagues and that your leadership will go far to preserve the programmatic and financial strength of both Medicaid and nutrition programs.

With respect to Medicaid, we ask that you:

1. Talk with your colleagues about the vital importance of Medicaid as the program that improves low-income Americans' access to doctors, preventive care and overall health; provides care at a lower cost than private insurance; and supports health care providers;
2. Request that if TANF re-authorization or any other additional legislation is to be included in the reconciliation bill, that the costs associated with the re-authorization not result in deeper cuts to Medicaid;
3. Oppose increasing cost sharing, reducing benefits available to Medicaid beneficiaries and any other provisions that diminish the availability and affordability of coverage;
4. Consider cost savings from other programs in the jurisdictions of the committees that are not targeted toward low-income people; and
5. To the degree that savings must be achieved in Medicaid, they should come from policies like increasing the Medicaid rebate and reducing payments to pharmacies, that help both the federal government and the states reduce the growing costs of prescription drugs, not from changes to cost sharing and benefits that are harmful to low-income people. These prescription drug cost saving proposals have been endorsed by the Administration, the National Governors' Association, the Medicaid Commission, and by advocates for beneficiaries and providers.

With respect to Food Stamps, we ask that you:

1. Talk with your colleagues about the importance of Food Stamps and the program's accomplishments: that it has diminished severe hunger that was prevalent prior to enactment and helped the country's neediest families, all with great efficiency and accountability;
2. Recommend that if the Food Stamp program is to be cut, as the chairmen of both Agriculture Committees have asserted, that the cuts total no more than the \$600 million proposed in President Bush's budget; and
3. Oppose any structural changes to the Food Stamp program, either through an optional, five state Food Stamp block grant or through a super waiver structure that would allow states to use food stamp funds for things other than basic nutritional assistance.

Not only are the lives and physical well being of nearly one half million people in Connecticut at stake, but so too are the financial resources of our state which will have to fill in where the federal government forsakes our neediest citizens.

We thank you in advance for doing all you can to protect the interests of the people of Connecticut in the reconciliation process.

Sincerely,

AIDS LIFE Campaign
AFSCME, Council 4

AFSCME, Local 714 (Representing DSS eligibility and other workers)
AFSCME, Local 2663 (Representing DCF & DSS Social Workers)
Bridgeport Child Advocacy Coalition
Broad-Park Development Corp.
Collaborative Center for Justice
Connecticut AIDS Residence Coalition
Connecticut Alliance for Retired Americans
Connecticut Association for Human Services
Connecticut Association of Area Agencies on Aging
Connecticut Association of Nonprofits
Connecticut Citizen Action Group
Connecticut Coalition Against Domestic Violence
Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ
Connecticut Food Association
Connecticut Food Bank
Connecticut Institute for the Blind
Connecticut Legal Rights Project
Connecticut Legal Services, Inc.
Connecticut Nonprofit Human Services Cabinet
Connecticut Oral Health Initiative
Connecticut Voices for Children
Connecticut Women's Consortium
End Hunger CT!
Family Service of Greater Waterbury, Inc.
Greater Hartford Legal Aid
Hartford Food System
Health Care for All
League of Women Voters of Connecticut
Legal Assistance Resource Center of CT
Middlesex Coalition for Children
National Alliance on Mental Illness of Connecticut
Norwich Human Services
People Against Injustice, New Haven, CT
Planned Parenthood of Connecticut
Safe Haven of Greater Waterbury, Inc.
Southwest Community Health Center, Inc.
Task Force on Child Hunger, Office of the Mayor, City of Middletown, CT